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SUBJECT: EMBASSY OFFICERS DISCUSS FOREIGN POLICY WITH
STUDENTS AT AL-AKHAWAYN UNIVERSITY

¶1. (U) This cable is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶2. (SBU) Summary: Poloffs visited Morocco's prestigious Al-Akhawayn University on April 3 to meet with faculty and discuss US-Morocco relations and human rights with undergraduate and graduate students as part of the mission's public diplomacy outreach effort. The roughly fifty students who attended remained engaged for the full two hours and asked more standard questions ranging from the US policy on the Western Sahara and the Free Trade Agreement to tougher questions on Iraq, US human rights violations, and perceived US support for leading dissident Nadia Yassine. Students requested that the USG increase efforts to resolve the Palestinian conflict and the Western Sahara, while others requested increased funding for programs in Morocco. We hope this positive exchange will broaden into a regular exchange with this important university. End Summary.

¶3. (U) On April 3, Polcouns and Poloff visited Al-Akhawayn University in Ifrane. This private university is the only English-language school of higher education in Morocco. (Note: Ifrane is located in the foothills of the Atlas mountains two hours from Rabat and was built by the French ca. 1910.) The purpose of the visit was to meet with the Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Mohammed Dahbi, and political science and international relations faculty members as well as to discuss US/Morocco relations and human rights. The invitation was extended by Audra Grant, who worked at INR from 1999-2004, and is now an associate professor of international relations at Akhawayn. The lecture and discussion were open to the campus of approximately 1100 students, and was well-advertised; several faculty required graduate students to participate.

¶4. (SBU) Polcouns opened with an overview of the US/Morocco bilateral relationship, describing it as dynamic and expanding on the basis of partnerships and growing interests between the two countries. Polcouns encouraged the audience to view the FTA as an opportunity for Moroccan creativity and entrepreneurship to shine through. Polcouns stressed US support for Moroccan reforms and emphasized the US encouragement for improved relations and better dialogue between the GOM and Algeria.

¶5. (SBU) Poloff discussed the human rights reports on Morocco and the Western Sahara, and distributed copies to the students. Poloff noted that these reports, along with the

International Religious Freedom and Trafficking in Persons reports, are readily available on the internet. The fact that the reports rely on the GOM, national and international nongovernmental organizations reports, press reports and individuals' conversations with Missionoffs was stressed. Recognizing that aspects of the report depend on several individuals making sound judgments seemed to resonate with the students. As the process of producing the reports is not widely understood, Poloff explained this as well.

¶6. (SBU) The students asked insightful questions, some of which focused on how the USG views the "Arab" or "Muslim" World (Umm al-Arabiyya/Dar al-Islam). As the students represented various religious and political understandings, according to the faculty members, the variety of their questions was not surprising. Poloffs emphasized the positive nature of the bi-lateral relationship and that this relationship is growing and evolving based on emerging needs as well as long-term interests.

¶7. (SBU) Following the robust question and answer period, which focused primarily on the Western Sahara, the FTA, press freedoms and specifics in the human rights report, e.g., the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (IER), Polcouns asked the students if they had any special messages for the USG. We had several responses: the USG needs to be more involved in the resolution of the Western Sahara issue, help Morocco with the "Algerian threat," and it must increase efforts to resolve the Palestinian conflict. One student said that the US must "polish its image in the Arab-Muslim world" and should use a "marketing" perspective. When this student made her comment, several others nodded in agreement as they did when another student said that the USG should provide more funding to Morocco.

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